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Talmidae Rhetoricae: Drashing Up Models and Methods for Jewish Rhetorical Studies

Janice W. Fernheimer

A [perspective by incongruity is a] method for gauging situations by verbal 'atom cracking'. That is, a word belongs by custom to a certain category—and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to a different category.

—Kenneth Burke (94)

I began the year 2000 belonging to the category “graduate student in English,” and in June that year I traveled to Israel, where I was “wrenched loose” linguistically, politically, academically, and spiritually. My default language went from English to Hebrew. The relative newness and political stability of the United States before 9/11 were usurped by Jerusalem’s heavy history, which I then experienced in-the-making amidst the Second Intifada that began in September and continued throughout and beyond my stay. Perhaps most important for this issue of *College English*, I left the halls of the English department at University of Texas–Austin to enter the *bet midrash* (house of study) of Pardes, an institute for traditional Jewish textual study.¹ Within those noisy walls, I worked through difficult texts with a variety of *chevrotot* (study partners). At Pardes, Aristotle took second seat to Rashi, literary criticism was replaced by midrash (which the rabbis intended to fill in the gaps, whether they appeared in the Written or Oral Torah), and my rhetorical literacies were supplemented with talmudic training, Jewish texts, and new pedagogical practices.

Although this issue is being published nearly ten years later, it owes its inception not only to *College English* for providing a public outlet and to its contributors for their willingness to work through the questions of “what are Jewish rhetorics?”

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“where do we locate them?” and “how do we study them?” but also to the numerous incongruities I experienced in Israel. These incongruities allowed me to begin contemplating how arguments over specific interpretations of Talmud, Midrash, and Tanakh might relate to conversations about post-structuralism, rhetorical theory, and pedagogy I had begun to enter as a teacher-scholar in English studies. To borrow some words from LuMing Mao’s introduction to the special issue on Chinese rhetorics, published in *College English* (2010), the “what and where” of Jewish rhetorics only began to come into focus for me because I had been wrenched loose from my graduate program, thrust into the numerous perspectives by incongruity my year in Israel provided, and thus differently oriented to understand my connections to Jewish texts, English studies, and rhetoric.

Similar to a pun, which “links by tonal association words hitherto unlinked,” perspectives by incongruity, as Kenneth Burke explains, links “hitherto unlinked words by rational criteria instead of tonal criteria,” and are “impious” with “regards [to] our linguistic categories established by custom” (95). It is perhaps ironic that my scholarly impieties began in Jerusalem, but my experiences abroad laid the foundations for the questions I’m asking now: what might Jewish rhetorical studies be, what might its methods entail, and what might its existence mean for the concept of rhetorical traditions more generally? If Burke’s notion of perspective by incongruity teaches us nothing else, it teaches us about the importance of relationships and connections, about the need to recognize that those connections (or perceived lack thereof) are always constructed symbolically, and thus can always be reconstructed, differently connected, or perhaps even newly interconnected in ways not previously imaginable until experienced incongruously. Although it would be tough to claim Burke as a Jewish rhetor, this emphasis on relationship, on “to-ness,” as the Hebrew preposition indicated by the letter *lamed* [ל] highlights, might well be one principle of Jewish rhetorics that girds a diversity of rhetorical and pedagogical practices evident across thousands of years of Jewish history and three major communities: Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Mizrachi.

Until fairly recently, academic custom has not put the terms *Jewish studies* and *rhetoric* together, nor has the field of rhetoric and composition studies explicitly engaged with colleagues and counterparts in Jewish studies. Growing out of conversations begun in Troy, New York, at the 2007 Rhetoric Society of America (RSA) Summer Institute Workshop on Rhetoric and Jewish Studies, this special issue of *College English* aims to provide a forum for interdisciplinary interconnection, and in so doing, to forge a number of new relationships—between the disciplines of rhetoric and composition and Jewish studies, between and among Jewish rhetorics and the Western Greco-Roman tradition, and between Jewish and other rhetorical traditions, be they defined as ethnic, cultural, alternative, or non-Western. In forging these new connections, this issue asks, and proffers some nascent answers to, the

following questions: What happens to what we commonly refer to as the (Western Greco-Roman) *Rhetorical Tradition* (Graff 1) when we introduce Jewish voices to it? What happens to Jewish texts, writings, arguments, and pedagogies, not to mention theological, hermeneutical, religious, and ritual practices, when we view and interpret them through the lens of the Western Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition? Given the long history of Jewish religious traditions and the various paths of migration, exile, and trade over which Jewish people and practices have traveled, how do we begin to construct or define Jewish rhetorical traditions?

DEFINING JEWISH RHETORICS AND TRACING THEIR WANDERING HISTORIES

Before we can begin to understand or forge connections to Jewish rhetorical traditions, it might be helpful to ask the obvious question: what are Jewish rhetorics? Such a question invites a variety of methodological approaches and challenges, not the least of which is a definitional issue: What is *Jewish*, and what qualifies a text or individual as such? Is a text Jewish because its author self-identifies as a Jew or because others identify him or her as Jewish? What happens when self-identification and community affiliation come in conflict? Take, for example, the problem of situating Baruch de Spinoza.² Spinoza, the Sephardic, Dutch Jew of Portuguese descent, is arguably one of the greatest and best-known Jewish philosophers, praised for his work in rationalism and as a precursor to the Enlightenment. Yet his status as a Jew while he was writing what later became his most famous work, *The Ethics*, is questionable. Although Spinoza had been born Jewish in 1656, when he was only twenty-three his community issued a *cherem* against him precisely because of the kind of beliefs (beliefs they and others deemed heretical) he advocated. A *cherem* is a specifically Jewish communal act of shunning, which forbids an individual from practicing with the community, one of the most important and highly valued aspects of Jewish life.

The terms of Spinoza's *cherem* were particularly extreme. In addition to other prohibitions, he was not to associate with anyone, nor was anyone to come within four cubits of him, and most important, no one was to read his writings (Kasher and Biderman). To complicate things further, the reasons behind the community's decision to issue this severe decree are murky at best. Some scholars argue that Spinoza's controversial beliefs alone were to blame, while others speculate that the community feared Spinoza's beliefs would endanger the Amsterdam Jewish community as a whole by angering the local Christian authorities and leadership. Unlike most *cherems*, Spinoza's was never revoked, and he opted to go by the name Benedictus (or the shorter version Bento) after it was proclaimed.

So can we still claim his works as part of the Jewish tradition even if he wrote them while he was banished from the community, and if yes, by which criteria? Does

his birth into a Jewish family mark him as Jew, regardless of whether his community accepted him or he self-identified as Jewish? To make such a claim would seem to uphold the idea that “once a Jew always a Jew,” a belief that was used to justify persecution and murder during the Spanish Inquisition, when even conversion to Christianity did not always protect Jews from mistreatment.

As I’ve argued elsewhere, when defined by non-Jews, the criteria for what or who counts as Jewish are often far more inclusive and broad than the terms set by communities of Jews themselves (“From Jew to Israelite” 203).³ Jewish law, *halakha*, sets only two stipulations for Jewish identity: you’re either born to an authenticated Jewish mother (and you’re not an apostate), or you convert to Judaism through a ritual process that combines education with practice and is sanctioned by a Jewish rabbinic court, a *bet din*. Although these stipulations seem simple at first glance, they call attention to a tension between values within the Jewish tradition that privilege either the native born, thus making Jewishness more particular and less porous, or that privilege religious aspects of Jewish culture and ritual, which can be adopted by anyone willing to take the time to learn them, thus situating Judaism within a more universal arena. This tension is a productive dissociation,⁴ which allows for generative debate and offers the potential for a more broadly conceived and inclusive sense of Jewish peoplehood. The way Jewish communities prioritize these elements shifts and changes over time and often in response to their treatment by non-Jewish communities. Yet even though this dual definition provides room for inclusiveness, different Jewish communities don’t always recognize one another as Jewish. For example, Orthodox or Ultra-Orthodox Jews do not recognize the legitimacy of Reform, Conservative, and even some other Orthodox rabbis’ conversion procedures. Moreover, Reform Jews accept patrilineal descent, whereas other Jews do not.

My point here is not to digress into a discussion of how different Jewish communities profess to be the “true” Jews to the exclusion of others, but rather to call attention to the fact that identifying someone as Jewish is no simple matter, and identifying Jewish ideas, values, or concepts is all the more complicated. To return to Spinoza, we can see that his case offers an illustrative example of the types of questions that might be raised about a particular author’s or text’s relationships to Jewish traditions, beliefs, communities, and values. While I wish I could offer a clear-cut and straightforward answer about which values, beliefs, rituals, and traditions are definitively Jewish, I don’t think there is one; or to be more blunt, I don’t think there is *only* one, or could be, or should be. Just as earlier I argued for the importance of putting arguments and traditions in relation, I argue here that exploring an author’s or text’s relation to whichever Jewish tradition is most relevant based on historical or geographical context might provide one approach to discovering Jewish rhetorics. But it’s not, nor should it be, the only approach.

MAKING SPACE FOR JEWISH RHETORICS: TOWARD METHODS FOR DISCOVERY, DEFINITION, AND RECONSTRUCTION

So how do scholars go about discovering, defining, and situating Jewish rhetorics? Although attendees at the 2007 RSA Workshop on Rhetoric and Jewish Studies began to ask and tentatively answer these questions, it was by no means the first attempt by scholars in rhetoric, composition, or Jewish studies to raise these methodological issues. Rather than provide a definitive answer, however, let me introduce another illustrative example to raise a few more productive questions.

In “Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric,” first published in the *Hebrew Union College Annual (HUCA)* in 1949, David Daube argues that the development of talmudic law should be interpreted within its Hellenistic context and, perhaps more controversially, that “Rabbinic methods of interpretation derive from Hellenistic rhetoric” (239). Though he claims that the rabbis “thoroughly hebraized” the material and that this “borrowing took place in the best period of Talmudic jurisprudence,” he still contends that at least “in its beginnings, the Rabbinic system of hermeneutics is a product of the Hellenistic civilisation then dominating the entire Mediterranean world” (240). Now, Daube’s claims are bold ones, and they raise several important methodological questions.

First, what are the rabbinic interpretation methods of which Daube speaks? Derived from Rabbi Hillel (a famous Pharisee rabbi from around 30 BCE), they are seven interpretive principles used to explicate and understand Biblical passages and talmudic law (Daube 240); these principles form some of the basic interpretive rules used to both teach and learn Jewish texts, even in contemporary *yeshivot*.⁵ Based on an argument of geographic and historical proximity—Rabbi Hillel was Cicero’s contemporary (Daube 246)—and a genealogy of teachers, Daube makes a compelling case that Hillel’s principles, often recognized as the “most Jewish” of Jewish rhetorical practices, may indeed be Greek or Egyptian in their origins.⁶

Daube’s argument depends on evidence of Alexandrian influence on Rabbi Hillel, which he infers from historical dates and geographical proximity. Daube points out that Rabbi Hillel learned from Shemaiah and Abtalion, who were represented by the (Palestinian) Talmud as proselytes, and who Daube claims “studied and taught” in Alexandria “long enough to go on using Egyptian measures even after settling in Palestine” (see also notes 4–6). Although Daube notes that the Palestinian Talmud represents Hillel’s teachers as both proselytes and some of the first “*darshanim*, [or] ‘interpreters of Scripture’” and that the “historicity” of their status as proselytes has been questioned, he goes on to take claims about their geographic origins at face value (241). If Daube is right, then Hillel’s teachers might be credited with the transfer of cultural values from the Greeks to the Jews. What gets glossed over in this deft

and persuasive move, however, is precisely what Abtalion and Shemaiah were learning in Alexandria, how they had access to it, how they taught it, and how it might have been transformed when they taught it to Hillel. These kinds of connections and interconnections, which trace how learning styles and concepts travel (along with people) across geographic and cultural borders, certainly provide rich avenues for further investigation. These paths of influence might help to answer a second methodological question: where do we situate Jewish rhetorics with respect to other rhetorical traditions, including but certainly not limited to the Greco-Roman one?

As the elusive designation “Mediterranean” makes clear, the question of geography and placement is yet another methodological concern that is both important and difficult to answer, especially because the titles we append to geographic locations serve to shape and influence the intellectual spaces in which we place them. For example, the geography question calls attention to the tendency to bifurcate rhetorical traditions into the categories of Western or non-Western. Just as Jewish people disrupt the binary of black and white in the United States, so Jewish rhetorics disrupt the typical binary of Western and non-Western. Many Jewish rhetorics were composed in what is considered to be the contemporary Middle East or North Africa: Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, and other geographical locales that get figured as either East or West, depending on the period of history, the person writing it, and the end purpose to which such a history is put in service.⁷ Consequently, geography often complicates rather than elucidates matters.

The ambiguity of space and place is not limited to the question of origins for Jewish traditions; it also confronts scholars who attempt to construct a place for Jewish rhetorics. This ambiguity is evident even in the collections that our field has produced, where Jewish rhetorics are included in non-Western or ancient non-Greek traditions (Lipson and Binkley, *Rhetoric Before and Beyond the Greeks; Ancient Non-Greek Rhetorics*), yet absent from Keith Gilyard and Vorris Nunley’s *Rhetoric and Ethnicity*. Instead, not until 2008 was the first collection of rhetoric and composition essays explicitly focused on Jewish themes and ideas published, not in connection with other cultural rhetorics, but in its own volume: Andrea Greenbaum and Deborah Holdstein’s foundational *Judaic Perspectives in Rhetoric and Composition*. I make this point not to critique the fine and important work in all of the aforementioned collections, but rather to call attention to the uncertain *place* of Jewish rhetorics.

This ambiguity reflects a broader uncertainty regarding the place and relationship of Jewish studies’ initiatives with respect to other interdisciplinary, ethnic, or area studies programs, and Jewish texts with respect to other canonical traditions—are they part of “the” tradition, whichever it is, or are they merely a subfield, an alternative perspective on “the” tradition? Versions of this question were asked at recent national meetings, such as that of the Association for Jewish Studies in 2007,

where a panel titled “Funny, You Don’t Look American: Integrating American Jewish History into the History of the United States” asked this question about the position of Jewish narratives in American history (Berman). Another panel, “Jewish Studies in the Universities: Mainstreamed or Still Anomalous?” asked this question about the position of Jewish studies with respect to other “studies” programs (Goldenberg). And the uncertain place of Jewish authors in American literary studies was highlighted by a panel titled “Does the English Department Have a Jewish Problem?” (Cutter) at the 2009 Modern Language Association meeting. This topic sparked enough controversy to receive attention in *Inside Higher Education’s* coverage of the conference (Jaschik). Even the community of Jewish rhetorics scholars, Klal Rhetorica, recently posed a version of this question when a member queried the list to discern members’ interest in assembling a panel to address the question of whether Jewish rhetorics are ethnic rhetorics (Bernard-Donals) for an upcoming meeting of the National Communication Association. As illustrated by these recent discussions, the placement of Jewish traditions is a complex one, not unrelated to the placing of Jewish individuals within the social and racial spectrums of the United States and other national, cultural traditions and even the disciplinary “homes” of academic study.

Although the examples both Daube and Spinoza provide suggest strong connections to the Western tradition, and depending on who is doing the research, Jewish rhetorics sometimes get placed in this category, the category is not always relevant, nor is it free from change over time. To return to the concept of *to-ness* with which I began this essay, I suggest that such positioning is neither definitive nor unchanging, but by necessity must be put in relation to other traditions and other categories. If we consider Jewish histories of exile, trade, and diaspora, a geographically bound area for Jewish rhetorics becomes extremely difficult to define and demarcate. Rather than allow the boundaries of East and West to hem in Jewish rhetorics, however, it is more helpful to recognize that the Jewish rhetorical tradition is a transnational one, which by necessity must be approached with a “transnational rhetorical perspective” such as that advocated by Wendy S. Hesford and Eileen E. Schell. Such a transnational approach “strives to address how rhetorical concepts are shaped by cultural, social, and economic interconnectivities and interrelations and cross-border and cross-cultural mobilizations of power, language, resources, and people.” Moreover, a transnational approach “attempts to offer a more complex and sophisticated theory of culture, cultural interconnectivity, and language, addressing how cultures transact and interact with one another in a variety of mediums—face-to-face, digitally, textually—and through international policymaking and transnational organizing” (465). To the extent that Daube’s essay attempts to provide this type of context, it offers an early example of the way such research can and should be conducted.

Because what I'm advocating for here is a deep analysis of authors, texts, and traditions in context, while also considering how such authors, texts, and traditions might be put in dialogue or relationship with other authors, texts, and traditions, both within and among various Jewish communities as well as other traditions, it might be helpful to include some of Scott R. Stroud's recent argument in "Pragmatism and the Methodology of Comparative Rhetoric." Stroud advocates for a pragmatist approach to doing such comparative rhetoric, suggesting that our answers to such questions as "what are Jewish rhetorics?" fall into "(at least) two" important purposes with corresponding methodological categories: (1) descriptive or historical, and (2) constructive or reconstructive. According to Stroud, the historical approach "emphasize[s] the context of the original text, linguistic concerns in translation of that text into other languages, and intellectual concerns likely held by the original author of the text from that time period," whereas the "constructive or reconstructive" approach "accept[s] some slack in historical accuracy, and instead strives for usefulness of appropriation or reconstruction in light of some pressing problem in rhetorical theory and practice" (360). In the second mode, a scholar "examines the rhetorical or philosophical tradition of another culture, not to 'get it right,' but to find some useful ways to think through or around the pathways one's own tradition offers." Stroud is quick to point out that a respectful balance must be struck so as not to do injustice to a particular text or tradition, and he suggests that "a pragmatist approach to comparative rhetoric" can help to maintain this ethical equilibrium because it "would highlight the legitimacy of the historical (descriptive) and reconstructive (constructive) approaches to such endeavors, all the while situating both approaches between the extremes that assert there is *one* historical truth about" a particular text or tradition "and the alternative extreme that" a particular text or tradition "can mean anything we want" (361). Stroud's heuristic is a productive one, and the essays in this issue of *College English*, like earlier work in Jewish rhetorics, draw on and reflect both approaches, making space in new and interesting ways.

Although a few scholars published early essays related to the topics of Jewish rhetorics (Tauber; Daube), not until the 1980s did Jewish rhetorics begin to garner greater attention from scholars across the disciplines of English, Jewish, rhetoric, and communication studies. In 1981 David Frank published "'*Shalom Achshav*'—Rituals of the Israeli Peace Movement" in *Communication Monographs*, and David Stern published "Rhetoric and Midrash: The Case of the Mashal" in *Prooftexts*. In 1982 Susan Handelman published her groundbreaking book *The Slayers of Moses*. In 1984 Arthur Lesley published "A Survey of Medieval Hebrew Rhetoric" in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, and just a year later, Isaac Rabinowitz published "Pre-Modern Jewish Study of Rhetoric: An Introductory Bibliography" in *Rhetorica*. A closer look at these early titles alone can yield a generative, if far from exhaustive heuristic for ways into the field. Frank examines the political movements in the

contemporary nation-state of Israel; Stern examines the midrashic form of *masbal* as a rhetorical tool; Handelman looks at the rabbinic underpinnings in contemporary literary theory; Lesley examines Hebrew rhetorics across the span of many years, languages, and geographies to discover the relationships between and among Jewish communities under Muslim, Spanish, and other European rule in the medieval period; and Rabinowitz crafts a bibliography to orient readers in what he terms a “comparatively neglected field of rhetorical study, one that certainly deserves, and will bounteously reward, more extensive cultivation” (Rabinowitz 144).

This special issue of *College English* answers Rabinowitz’s call for further cultivation and builds upon the important work published in a variety of spaces and publications over the last thirty years. Throughout the 1990s a group of scholars met as part of the Jewish Rhetoric Seminar at the National Communication Association’s annual meeting. In 1999 Erika Falk published “Jewish Laws of Speech: Toward a Multicultural Rhetoric” in the *Howard Journal of Communications*, and in 2003 the first special issue dedicated to Jewish rhetorics, “Rhetoric in the Jewish Tradition,” guest edited by David Frank, was published in the *Journal of Communication and Religion*. The issue featured some of the most-cited articles in the emerging field, such as Steven B. Katz’s “Letter as Essence” and Frank’s “The Jewish Countermodel” along with less well-known, but equally valuable essays. These included Sam Edelman’s “Ancient Traditions, Modern Needs” and Amos Kiew’s “Theodore Herzl’s *The Jewish State*.” Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, Jewish rhetorics, like a variety of “alternative,” cultural, or non-Western rhetorical traditions, began to garner greater attention as the very notion of “the” rhetorical tradition was complicated (Graff, Walzer, and Atwill; Lipson and Binkley, *Ancient and Rhetoric*; for an earlier account, see Donawerth et al.).

THE ESSAYS IN THIS ISSUE

The essays included in this special issue, like earlier work in Jewish rhetorics, attempt to both locate and make space for Jewish rhetorics. Whether they call attention to the importance of mutuality and reciprocity in treating the Other, or to the possibility for an exilic rhetoric grounded in the Jewish tradition, or to the specific constraints Jewish women face in constructing a public voice in both digital and face-to-face environments, or to midrash as a Jewish rhetorical practice that creates space for more complex understanding by interrelating texts, the essays in this issue gracefully traverse the mixed terrain of Jewish and rhetorical studies. Because the purpose of the issue was to provide space for connection, border crossing, and relationship building, perhaps it should come as no surprise that the pieces included here focus on the importance of making space.

Susan Handelman's essay calls attention to the way Jewish rhetorics make space for and create relationships to others through an ethic of mutuality and reciprocity. She locates a Jewish rhetorical methodology in the teachings of a lesser known Sephardic, French Jewish thinker, Rabbi Yehouda Leon Askenazi; and she also uses "a classically Jewish rhetorical" mode "of nonlinear midrashic exegesis" to work "line-by-line glossing, explaining, commenting, and elaborating a passage whose every word or phrase is assumed to have many levels of meaning" (594) to elicit a "notion of Jewish rhetoric" (592) from a rich epigraph from Askenazi. Providing a corrective to what she perceives as the misplacement of the Other's priority in contemporary thought, Handelman provides deep analysis of Askenazi's teachings and suggests that "[t]he solution to violence can be found only in reciprocity" or "a kind of 'equation of fraternity'" in Askenazi's terms. Of course, "[t]his is not a formal or mathematical 'equation,' but an equilibrium, a balance, a particular way of *giving and receiving* that maintains the dignity of each" (593; emphasis in original). She argues that "without mutuality there is failure," and that both Askenazi and Chaim Perelman shared an emphasis on relationship. Whereas Askenazi highlights the need for mutuality and reciprocity, Handelman argues that for Perelman, rhetoric is "that form of discourse dependent *upon a relation to an other*" (602; emphasis in original). Her essay not only puts three important Jewish thinkers in conversation—Emmanuel Levinas the philosopher, Askenazi the rabbi, and Perelman the rhetorician—but also allows her to perform these three roles throughout, calling attention to and enacting the interconnections among them simultaneously.

Michael Bernard-Donals's essay similarly works to elicit a notion of Jewish rhetoric from a particular set of circumstances, though his analysis focuses on a public debate in which citizens attempted to argue civilly and deliberatively whether Madison, Wisconsin, should have become a sister city to Rafah in Gaza. As Bernard-Donals's careful analysis illustrates, the problem of how to address and engage the Other becomes particularly acute when discussions turn to the issues surrounding Israel/Palestine. He uses the miscommunications evident in a public discussion gone awry as an opportunity to argue for the importance of creating a different relationship to others, through what he terms "an exilic rhetorical position," which he argues is a "particularly Jewish rhetoric that allows us to meet the problem of exile and the alien head on" (611).

Andrea Lieber carefully analyzes Orthodox Jewish women's blogs to illustrate how the digital realm can provide new spaces for Orthodox Jewish women to participate in Jewish life without breaking the laws of modesty that otherwise might prevent them from such public engagement. Lieber writes, "If Jewish law limits the expression of women's voices in the public sphere, the blog provides a paradoxically 'silent' way to raise one's voice." Even though most of the women writing such blogs do not self-identify as feminists, she argues that "[p]erhaps writing is so empowering

precisely because it articulates voice in a way that is perceived as non-transgressive: blogging allows for the assertion of a voice that is ‘heard’ by readers, but does not overtly violate the halakhic prohibitions against speaking publicly” (629). Illustrating how Jewish practices work in conjunction with new technological affordances, Lieber examines how these women transform public digital space into an extension of the Jewish home.

David Metzger and Steven B. Katz also call attention to the ways in which texts create space by arguing for the importance of midrash as a Jewish rhetorical practice that not only fills in gaps in understanding, but does so in a way that refuses to close “arguments down,” and instead “continually creates new discursive spaces where none could have existed before (or discovers and opens new spaces in old places).” Metzger and Katz point out that although “some of these discourses are quite fantastical,” the midrashim still remain “grounded in the reality of scripture” (650). Demonstrating that even G/d needs to “do midrash” to make sense of loss, Metzger and Katz show how “[m]idrashic rhetoric accepts the multiplicities of truth” as well as “the partiality and limitations of perspective (even G/d’s in these midrashim), and the necessity of privileging one version of truth over another (or deception over truth).” Like Lieber’s essay, theirs calls attention to the power of women’s voices: in one of the texts they analyze, only the foremother Rachel is able to successfully persuade G/d. By illustrating the powerful ways midrash works, not just to provide deeper understanding through the continual interconnection of text, but also by creating a beautiful midrash of their own, Metzger and Katz illustrate the importance of midrash as Jewish rhetorical practice.

Like the art of midrash itself, which, as Metzger and Katz suggest, renews itself by creating new connections, each of these essays discovers new ways of connecting with Jewish rhetorics by mapping additional spaces for them. Like a series of midrashim, however, these essays are merely the beginning for many more interconnections to be made by scholars who draw on these and other textual waters. Recognizing the multiplicity of method and the importance of opening up rather than closing off, this introduction will end with a return to its beginning by offering yet another perspective by incongruity, and by providing a ‘drash for this essay’s title and for Burke’s definition of humans as homo-dialectus. I would like to suggest that in doing the work of Jewish rhetorics, we all become *talmidat rhetoricae*, or students of rhetoric. The word *talmidai*,⁸ from the Hebrew roots *lamed* [ל], *mem* [מ], *dalet* [ד], is at the heart of the words for studying, teaching, learning, and student. In connecting Jewish study, individuals, and texts with rhetoric, I hope we will remember to always learn, teach, study, and be students, engaging others with reciprocity, mutuality, and humility, and continually making and forging new interconnections while opening up more paths for study.

NOTES

1. The Hebrew word *Pardes* (peh [p], resh [r], dalet [d], samech [s]) literally means "orchard," but as both Handelman and Metzger and Katz explore in more detail in their essays, it is also an acronym for the four levels of interpretation used to explicate texts: *pasbut* (simple), *remetz* (hint or homiletic), *d'rash* (allegorical), and *sod* (mystical or secret/hidden). The word is figured in a prominent midrash about Torah study, and it figuratively denotes a place to study and learn.

2. I am thankful for Pat Bizzell's work on Spinoza, which brought this problem to my attention.

3. I've made this argument at greater length in "From Jew to Israelite."

4. I'm rehearsing here an abbreviated version of my argument connecting Jewish identity to Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's concepts of universal audience and dissociation published in "Black Jewish Identity Conflict."

5. Plural for *yeshiva*, the place where (usually and mostly) Jewish men study Torah (both Oral and Written). *Pardes*, which I mentioned earlier, is an exception in that it allows both women and men to study together. The word comes from the Hebrew root for the word "to sit" or "dwell," and though most men who study might be said to dwell in the place of Torah, they often are not sitting when studying.

6. As Daube points out himself, orthodox Jewish communities believe these principles were of "Sinaitic origin" revealed by G-d to Moses (239).

7. The space or place of Israel as a contemporary nation-state is also similarly difficult to categorize. Although a full discussion of commonplaces concerning debates about Israel/Palestine is well beyond the scope of this introduction, it is important to note that the question of whether Israel is Western, and *apart from* rather than *a part of* the culture of its neighboring nations, receives significant attention in constructions of the conflict and proposed resolutions to it.

8. A version of the plural for students, *talmidim*, specific to a Hebrew grammatical construction called *smichoot*, which forms compound nouns.

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